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ALUMNAE ASSOCIATIONS, THEIR OPPORTUNITIES AND OBLIGATIONS¹

BY MARY E. GLADWIN, R.N.

WASN'T it Edward Everett Hale who said that it was impossible for two or three persons to come together without immediately proceeding to draw up a constitution and by-laws? Lodges, clubs, leagues, associations, legions, federations and societies,—one sees them founded under a great variety of names and for seemingly every purpose under the sun: play, religion, study, education, government, and all sorts of fads and fancies. It follows that organizations of one sort or another have come to play a very important part in our lives. It isn't strange then to find doctors and nurses following the universal tendency. Many of you in the years just passed have seen them meeting in very strange places, within the sound of great guns and in momentary danger of shell fire, just as I have seen them on the Danube and the Ægean.

Alumnae associations are founded as a result of a desire to come together, to keep in touch with other members of our profession, to maintain a closer contact with our schools and hospitals, and to make an effort to keep alive certain ideals which the stress of a busy professional life has a tendency to obscure. Except in sermons and commencement exercises, English-speaking people seem to dislike to be reminded that they have ideals and aspirations for the betterment of mankind. Nurses are like other folk in being very shy to acknowledge and in keeping carefully hidden, the ideals and purposes which animate them.

As we have come together to consider our obligations and opportunities we need to remind ourselves that this profession of ours, by means of which most of us earn our living, is an outgrowth of the need and suffering of mankind when in sickness and sorrow; that it originated in forgetfulness of self, in that desire which is common to all the world,—the longing to help those who are in need. To recognize that it is a desire common to all sorts and conditions of men, one has only to consider the appeal which such organizations as the Red Cross, the Near East Relief, the Hoover Relief Administration make in every community. The part which our work plays in modern life and thought is plainly seen in times of war and great calamity, when queens and princesses, great ladies

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everywhere, are eager to don the uniform of the nurse and to take upon themselves her functions.

In considering our beginnings, there is always in mind the figure of the nun, the sister of the Middle Ages who served on dim battle fields and places of pestilence and famine. For the needs of today, we have developed a woman of quite another sort, a woman carefully trained and carefully prepared for her work, a woman very much of the world, worldly. This woman in her trim uniform, with her modern efficiency and sureness, so different from the old time and old world Sister in her life and her appearance, in order to be really successful, needs to have somewhere in the background the desire for self effacement and self sacrifice in her work which characterized the nun of old.

In addition to these intangible obligations and opportunities which are so impossible to put into adequate words, there are many obvious, practical obligations and opportunities which are the property of the alumnae associations. You will recall them at once: the fostering of the social life of the nurse, the keeping alive of school friendships, the study of new measures in medicine, surgery, and social science, the encouragement of higher education both for the pupil and for the graduate nurse, the constant influence upon the interest in the school from which the nurses graduated. Alumnae associations sometimes fail to realize the place which they occupy as the foundation of all other nursing organizations, state and national. Vigorous and up-to-date alumnae associations naturally mean vigorous and progressive district, state, and national bodies. It is to the alumnae associations that we must look for the training of nurses for active membership and leadership in the great associations of power and far reaching influence.

In order that its work may be done well and not in the casual fashion that sometimes characterizes it, it must receive careful thought and planning. Let us for a few minutes consider some of that work. The study of parliamentary law in conjunction with the study and encouragement of public speaking should run like a bright and vivid thread through all work done or contemplated. An active committee for the presentation of new methods and the review of old ones is a great help. A committee to report on new books and publications on nursing subjects and subjects of interest to nurses. A committee to report on current events is of great assistance and it goes without saying that there should be a small and very active committee to solicit subscriptions and obtain material for the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING. We cannot afford to neglect the tools of our trade. There should be, of course, a

committee on nursing education to bring before the nurses the many opportunities which are being offered for the further education of the nurse.

In doing student nurse recruiting, lately, it has astonished me to hear, over and over again, that old untruth, "After all her years of preparation the nurse is only good for ten years." To refute the statement, we may call attention to the story of Miss Maxwell, retiring at the age of seventy, after thirty years' service in the Presbyterian Hospital, New York. If you haven't read the July JOURNAL OF NURSING with its story of Miss Maxwell's years of hard work and splendid achievement, you have missed a great deal. Physicians, physiologists, psychologists, all the learned men, tell us that it is not work which ages and kills, but those things which so often go with hard work: worry, improper care of the body, lack of adjustment to one's surroundings, lack of real interest in one's work. It is wise to remember and to think over these words of Osler seemingly so simple: "The very first step towards success in any occupation is to become interested in it." That delightful story of Mrs. Burnett's, "The Secret Garden," with its children and their magic, is worth reading by any tired or discouraged nurse. The magic turns out to be only the mental attitude of the person performing it, the adjustment to life which all must make.

Then did you see, in the morning paper, that Dr. Thwing after being for thirty years President of Western Reserve is going to a summer school this year? And have you considered how much postgraduate work means to this generation? Every one of us should be intensely proud of the Department of Nursing and Health which Miss Nutting has made at Teachers College, and it should be the ambition of every nurse, at some time, to avail herself of its opportunities, if only for the summer work. In various cities, in spite of the shortage of teachers, the public school teachers are made to feel that their positions depend in some measure upon their occasional attendance at one of the great summer schools.

I hope you rejoiced over the Institute for Instructors of Nursing, held this last June at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton. A splendid type of school is that connected with the Miami Valley Hospital and it has set a splendid example and thereby added much to its desirability and reputation. Ohio is to be congratulated because it is forging ahead in its nursing matters. Aren't we proud of Miss Logan and the work being done in connection with the Cincinnati University? And didn't we draw a long breath of pleasure and delight that Western Reserve has created a Department of Nursing and Health under the efficient leadership of Miss Gray?

I am looking forward to the time when every school of established reputation will maintain short postgraduate courses. The advantages of postgraduate work and summer courses are not only for institutional and public health nurses, but also for private duty nurses. One of the things which made a great impression upon me as I went about the state was the sort of work being done by the teachers of Home Care of the Sick, especially in relation to the use of home appliances. It has occurred to me many times how useful an advanced course in the latter would be to private duty nurses. Cannot we have bigger and better schools, better able to maintain those standards of nursing which we have established with such difficulty?

Somewhere in Ohio, in connection with one of our many good schools, an Institute for Private Duty Nurses? Let us look forward to doing it next year,—an intensive piece of work with many demonstrations, and good teaching, made practical, vivid, interesting, appealing.

The relation between the School of Nursing and its Alumnae Association should be a very close and vital one, all the closer and more vital because the association has no power to dictate or advise in school matters. We need to remember sometimes that what affects the standing and reputation of one affects the standing and reputation of the other. It is the manifest duty of the Alumnae Association to work hard for the good of the school and to uphold and strengthen the influence of the superintendent of the school. The public judges the school by its present condition and it judges all past and present graduates accordingly. There are many good examples of how great an influence an Alumnae Association has on a school of nursing and of their interrelations. Consider for a moment that school in the east which was founded by "our" Mrs. Robb. The school is advertised by its graduates. It isn't an old school, but think of the long list of its famous women. Their absolute loyalty and devotion to each other are known everywhere. They furnish examples in many ways, but in none more notable than in their present effort to raise a million dollars to endow the school in order that it may do better work and more efficiently care for the sick. While it is not possible or necessary to raise a million dollars for your school, you can do something proportionally as valuable; first, in the sort of women and nurses you are, and second, in the support and loyalty you give in order to make it a bigger and better school, better able to maintain those standards of nursing which we have established with such difficulty.